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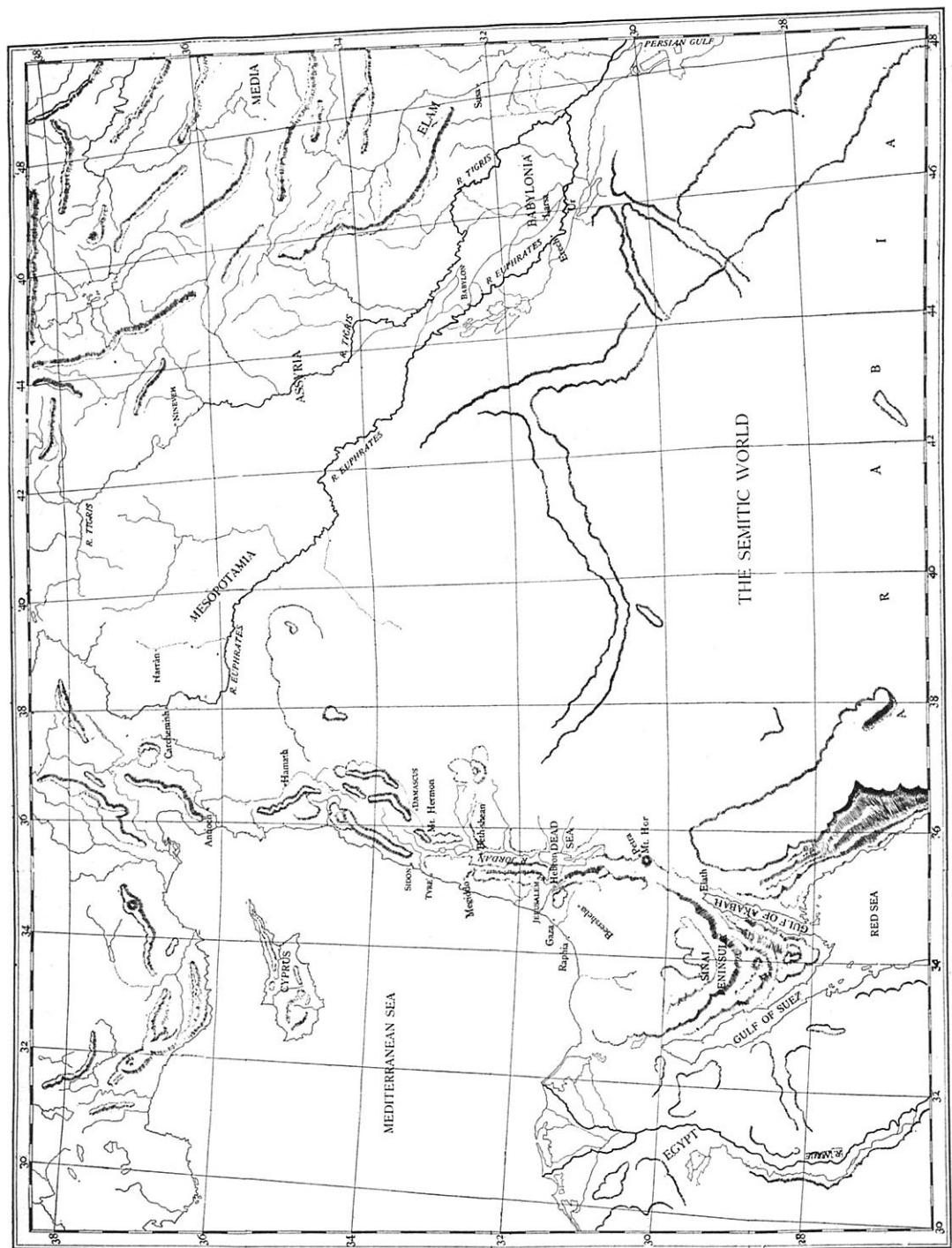
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Editorial

A QUARTER-CENTURY OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDY

The selection of the International Sunday-School Lessons for 1907 from the books of the Old Testament which stand first in the canonical arrangement brings forcibly to mind the changes that have taken place in Christian thought about these books within a generation. A quarter-century ago, when men now in the midst of their life-work as teachers and preachers were students in school, the idea that the Pentateuch—the Hexateuch we had not yet heard of—was not written by Moses was viewed from afar as one of those dangerous German heresies the importation of which into America would be the beginning of disaster to religion. Professor Osgood at Rochester and Professor Green at Princeton, not unaware of what was going on in Germany and of the tendency of things German to cross the ocean, were preparing the minds of their students against such danger by emphasizing the teaching of Jesus concerning the Old Testament, and interpreting it as settling once and for all the historicity and authority of the Old Testament books and their authorship. When in 1888 Professor Green and Professor Harper began in *Hebraica* their friendly debate over the analysis of the Pentateuch, Professor Harper presented the case for the analysis, but simply as an expositor, not judging the time ripe for an open advocacy of views so generally distasteful to American biblical scholarship, and not having himself reached a final judgment concerning them. There existed at that time no commentary by English or American authors based on the documentary theory; and it is safe to say that no Sunday-school publisher would have undertaken the issue of



lessons which advocated that view. What was true in reference to the Pentateuch held also respecting the rest of the Old Testament. That they who divided Isaiah's prophecies, assigning the later chapters to a post-exilic writer, were criminals fit to be classed with those who, as tradition affirms, sawed his body asunder, was a sentiment widely held among American biblical scholars.

With the beginning of 1907 thousands of Sunday schools will take up the study of the Old Testament books, beginning with Genesis. We venture no predictions as to the proportion of cases in which the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and the historicity of the stories of the creation, fall, and flood, will be defended in printed comment and oral teaching. But we run no risk in saying that the more modern theory, that the books were based on older documents and assumed their present form centuries after the time of Moses, with its corollary that much of the material is in no strict sense historical, but ancient legends shot through with the religious purpose of the prophet who gave it shape, will be by a large number of the more intelligent writers, pastors, and teachers either openly advocated or simply taken for granted, and that in very few instances will it require any special heroism to take this stand.

Has this change of view been marked by that decline of religion and that loss of influence of the Bible which twenty-five years ago were honestly feared by many of those who today hold these views? On the contrary, the change has been in every way to the advantage of religion and the Bible.

In the first place, the change has helped greatly to bring us back to the view of the Old Testament which Jesus held and implicitly taught. Never was argument honestly put forth by sincere men more perverse than that by which it was sought to defend the traditional views of the authority of the Old Testament and the authorship of its books by appeal to the words of Jesus. To be sure, Jesus showed no special interest in questions of authorship and date. To be sure, he did express his conviction of the high value and essential soundness of the moral teachings of the Old Testament. But he just as clearly criticized its ethics and religion in matters of detail, and by so doing denied to it as a whole that divine authority which it was sought to defend by appeal to his words. The truth is, his attitude

to it was distinctly critical and eclectic, alike in approval and in disapproval. But if he was not—as he certainly was not—the defender of the inerrancy of the Old Testament in ethics and religion, how is it possible to suppose, and what evidence is there to show, that he was interested to defend traditional views respecting the inerrancy of its narratives and the authorship of its books? The critic of the ethics of the Old Testament can hardly be cited as a witness against the legitimacy of literary and historical criticism. To bring about the adoption of Jesus' view of the Old Testament, New Testament exegesis and Old Testament criticism have co-operated.

In the second place, the change has tended mightily to retire finally from the scene the old battle between science and religion. Well-meant as were the efforts to reconcile the statements of Genesis, for example, with the evidence of geology and philology and history, the continuance of these efforts meant nothing else than the continuance of a struggle in which science was sure to win, and the Bible and religion to seem to lose. It was a false issue, in which the representatives of religion took up an untenable position, and their defeat was counted—falsely, to be sure, but honestly on both sides—the defeat of religion. That situation, let us be thankful, no longer exists. No intelligent geologist, philologist, or historian supposes that anything that geology, philology, or history might possibly prove can discredit the Bible. No student of the Bible who has learned what biblical scholarship of today stands ready to teach him is wasting any time in reconciling Genesis with any of the results of science. Our windows are open to all the winds of heaven and all the light of the sun. Genesis is not a textbook of science, physical or philological. It is a book of religion. If that religion is open to criticism—and we shall not be surprised to find that it is not of flawless perfection—in that we are interested, but not, save in the way of curiosity, in its failure to anticipate the scientific discoveries of recent centuries.

In the third place, the changed attitude toward the Old Testament books has enabled us to discover far more perfectly than we knew them before the real teachings of these books and the real history of Old Testament religion. So long as we read these first books of the Old Testament as the scientific record of how the world came to be and how the ancient nations arose, so long we missed of necessity the

great ethical and religious ideas of which the prophet to whom we owe them made them the medium of expression. So long as we assumed that the first books were also the oldest, we read the history of Israel's religion in no small part wrong end to. The tedious documentary analysis and laborious arranging and dating of documents and books are issuing slowly in a reconstructed history of the origin and growth of Semitic and Israelitish religion, in the light of which the significance of this unique divine revelation appears as never before.

Once more, the change of which we speak has removed what threatened to become a serious barrier between the religion of the church and the more intelligent classes of the community. With all its vices, the present age is characterized by an altogether admirable passion for reality. As never before possibly in the history of the world, men ask to be dealt with fairly, above all in matters of religion. No reverence for church or book deters them from asking respecting every assertion put forth in the name of religion: "Is it true?" Can it get out from behind the shelter of altar and screen, and defend itself in the full blaze of the sun? No possible policy could be more fatuous and foolish on the part of the church than to set itself against this spirit of the age. Men have ceased to be interested—and rightly so—in the question: "Is this the doctrine of my church?" It is for them no longer an ultimate question: "Is this the Christian view? Is this the teaching of the Bible?" All these retire behind the one question: "Is this the truth?" Now, in the same period in which the change of attitude in reference to matters of Old Testament criticism has taken place, and in part as consequence, in part as cause of it, a great change has come over the church in its attitude toward this demand for truth and reality. To a far less extent than formerly is it antagonized by influential men in the church; to a much greater extent than formerly it is adopted by them as their own attitude and as the basis of their defense of Christianity.

Finally, the change in attitude toward the Old Testament has been accompanied by, and has helped to bring about, a transfer of emphasis from the peripheral to the central things of religion. Compelled to recognize that some of the things vaguely felt to be vital were really of little importance, forced to recognize that the historicity of the

Jonah narrative and the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch were not really matters of religion at all, there has been a general re-examination of opinions and convictions in the sphere of religion, with a resulting emphasis upon the great central truths that are essential to the highest living, and a retirement into relative obscurity of those lesser matters about which difference of opinion, or even lack of definite opinion, is of minor consequence.

All these things are gain, and wholly so. We feared a loss, and went forward in investigation only under the impelling force of that loyalty to truth which is itself vital to true religion. We have experienced not loss but gain. Is it not ever so, when men resolutely face the evidence ?

THE INDEX FOR 1893-1906

The present issue of the *Biblical World*, which herewith closes the first quarter-century of its history, is accompanied by an Index to the twenty-eight volumes published since the journal took its present name in 1893. The motive of this publication is a practical one. It is believed that many of the expositions of biblical passages and discussions of problems related to biblical study contained in these volumes have a value for students today, and that we are rendering our readers a real service by making this material more accessible to them. But the interest that attaches to this Index is not wholly because of its utilitarian value. Among the contributors are many who have rendered distinguished service to biblical scholarship in the last quarter-century, including not a few whose work has been terminated by death, and the reading of the list is calculated to deepen one's sense of the value of the services which these scholars, living and deceased, have rendered to biblical study. The index is especially noteworthy as exhibiting the wide and deep interest in biblical study of the founder and editor of the journal, the late President William Rainey Harper, of whom the *Biblical World* stands as a fitting monument.